Programs and Services

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U OF S COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE TO OFFER AGRIBUSINESS DEGREE

Starting in September 2006, students registered at the University of Saskatchewan will be able to work toward a Bachelor of Science in Agribusiness degree, according to Associate Professor Tom Allen of the Department of Agricultural Economics.

"Officially, the program starts next September, but we are already having a significant number of students changing their course load in January to be able to come into it.

"We have been trying to increase offerings in agribusiness at the College for years, decades really. In the mid-nineties, we looked at it seriously. We set up a committee, of which I was a co-ordinator, and we ended at that time developing a minor—a six-credit course—in agribusiness. It became almost immediately the most popular minor in the College. We kept hearing from past students and employers that we should be offering more business training to our students."

Allen points out that more than 50 per cent of students in agriculture schools end up in marketing, sales and other types of very applied business activities, according to a study conducted by the United States Department of Agriculture and Purdue University.

"Our studies with our students found the same thing. The majority of our graduates go into some form of management position. We looked further into it a couple of years ago with a more in-depth exploration of what our students do after graduation. We also conducted a major project where we hired a research assistant to survey the 50 largest agribusinesses in Western Canada to get a more accurate picture of needs."

What emerged at all levels was a desire among these agribusinesses to access graduates with more business training.

"What they were saying to us is they want agriculture science, but they also want the business training—and historically they have hired the agriculture students first, only to teach them the business afterwards," Allen says. "More recently, we have witnessed the reverse: a trend to hire business students who would then be taught some agriculture. What they would have preferred would have been to have students that have both the business and the agriculture training."

Allen explains how, two years ago, the College of Agriculture addressed the situation head on.

"We put a committee together and we started the planning and application process to develop a program that has a very large component offered through the College of Commerce, starting at the second year level. We have a certain amount of Commerce courses that are required, plus in the third and fourth years, students are able to access the upper year Commerce courses to complement their upper year agriculture courses. It is a good blend. I think it will be the preferred degree for any of the students that go into the agricultural businesses to work."

When asked if this is a Canadian first, Allen admits that others – at the Universities of Guelph and Manitoba, for instance – have been offering this specialty for some time.

"We are not industry leaders on this one. Agriculture has changed immensely in Saskatchewan. We have to be much more market aware. We have to be knowledgeable about trade issues. We can't just be producers. We are good at producing commodities, but now we also have to be marketers; we have to manage these businesses.

"If you think of it, the farm is not small business anymore. Many farms exceed the definition of small businesses—they are so big. You need the management skills and definitely, when you start looking at the whole value-chain, we've got connections between parts of the value-chain that weren't there before. Business skills are an essential component if you want to be successful."

Allen is pleased with the response from the community so far. He and his colleagues have been fielding calls from parents and prospective students from around Western Canada who had heard about this development, and already new students have expressed a desire to sign up.

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SASKATCHEWAN CATTLE FEEDERS CELEBRATE 25th ANNIVERSARY

There will be a little extra pride in evidence at this year's Saskatchewan Cattle Feeders Association (SCFA) Convention, January 27 and 28 in Saskatoon, as the organization celebrates its 25th anniversary.

Jamie Blacklock is the SCFA's General Manager.

"We are going with the theme 'Celebrate the Past and Create the Future' so that we are all aware of where we came from and the progress that we have made over 25 years. We should celebrate and be proud. Let's take a close look at where we are today and evaluate the facts of our situation so that we can make the best decisions for tomorrow."

Blacklock and her team have rounded up speakers guaranteed to make this event memorable. For instance, on Friday the 27th, National Meat Association Executive Director Rosemary Mucklow will address participants.

"She is a key person who has been in the meat industry for the last 40 years," notes Blacklock. "The National Meat Association is one of the greatest allies of the Canadian beef industry. They were an extremely strong voice and have been working very hard the whole time to get back to normalized trade of live cattle—she is a key player in the big picture. Rosemary Mucklow is going to bring a strong message on the importance of working together, not only within the livestock industry, but all the way through to the meat industry as well."

According to Blacklock, cattle feeders appreciate knowing the numbers that affect their business, so the SCFA is bringing in CanFax Senior Market Analyst Anne Dunford to address that need.

"Anne tends to be a big pull. The delegates like to hear what she has to say - what looks like it's coming down the pipe. She has current information and actual numbers for them to take back to their operations so they can make the best decisions for themselves. With tarde access to the U.S. renewed, a broader range of markets are accessible, so major changes are likely on the way."

The SCFA hosts this event in conjunction with the Livestock Loan Guarantee Program, the Livestock Markets and Order Buyers Association and Saskatchewan Quality Starts Here (QSH). They all have their annual meetings as well during the Convention, explains Blacklock.

"The cattle feeders were key in the development of the Livestock Loan Guarantee Program—a tight connection there, as well as with the Livestock Markets and Order Buyers Association. Concurrently, the QSH/VBP working group will meet. The Saskatchewan Cattle Feeders Association chairs that group, along with the Saskatchewan Stock Growers Association. We believe it is absolutely critical. It is all about on-farm food safety. From start to finish, we might as well all work together."

"The President's reception on Friday night gives our President a chance to speak face to face with the delegates and give a good overview of what we have been hashing out over the last year, along with what some of the topics and coming initiatives are," Blacklock says. "It is a good evening for the delegates and the members to sit down and really talk about the issues. It also sets the stage for the next day."

Michael Levy of Custom House Global Foreign Exchange will be one of the speakers featured on Saturday.

"He is a high-energy, entertaining presenter with tons of information to share. Cattle feeders are number crunchers, so they tend to enjoy the hard facts that Michael can expound upon. With renewed access to the U.S. and Japanese markets, the timing is great. He will be able to go a little more in depth in terms of currency and exchange rate factors."

The SCFA Convention's last guest speaker will be cattle industry consultant Charlie Gracey.

"His presentation is titled: 'Past, Present and Future of the Industry.' Charlie has been a key player in the Canadian industry. He has been involved at many different levels for a long time. We want to make sure participants know where we have come from so they are ready to take advantage of opportunities as they manifest themselves in the future."

Blacklock says the President's Reception and the Cattlemen's Feast 'n' Festivities are open to anyone who wants to come. "We sell a lot of additional tickets for these evenings."

The SCFA Convention and AGM takes place at the Saskatoon Inn. To find out more or register, visit: http://www.saskcattle.com/

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ORGANIC UPDATE IN BRUNO A MUST FOR INDUSTRY WITH BRIGHT OUTLOOK

Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food (SAF) Agribusiness Development Specialist Don Perrault wouldn't miss it for the world. The Organic Update, scheduled to take place at the Prairie Ursuline Centre in Bruno on February 15 and 16, is a must for any producer in this promising sector of the agricultural economy.

"The Organic Update is a two-day event targeting the organic community across Saskatchewan, but also outside the province, as we have noticed an increasing number of participants from other Prairie jurisdictions attending.

"This is the fourth year that we have held such an update," says Perrault. "In the first two years, we held one-day events in Melfort. Last year, we changed the format to a two-day event and we moved to this unique facility."

Organizers say holding the event in Bruno makes sense, as it is a central location and the facility lends itself well to the theme. The town is home to the annual Cherry Festival in August. The Organic Update is the emerging winter tradition.

"The first day we target producers, focusing mostly on organic management practices," says Perrault. "Sessions will cover both cropping and livestock production in dark brown and black soils. Basically, it is targeting the north and central regions of the province, and scientists will round up the sessions with discussions on soil dynamics, manure management and current organic research."

Brenda Frick, the Prairie Co-ordinator for the Organic Agriculture Centre of Canada, organizes the day.

"Essentially," explains Perrault, "day one focuses on interviews with over 30 successful organic producers. We will also bring a panel of expert organic farmers to highlight their innovative practices."

At the end of day one, there will be an all-organic supper hosted by the Prairie Ursuline Centre. This is always a treat.

"On day two, we are targeting more marketing and processing," Perrault goes on. "We will start with an update on the organic beef market—what potential exists there. And then there will be an update on the organic meat development strategy."

SAF Livestock Development Specialist Sandy Lowndes has been working with organic meat producers, and she will report some of her findings.

"We'll also have a speaker from Farmer Direct in Regina who will expand on markets, who is buying what in the organic field. This will be followed by a discussion on adding value to organic grains through processing with a representative of Northwest Community Mills Co-operative Ltd., an organic producer processing group located at Maymont. The group has just come back from Europe on a fact-finding trip, and they will report on their findings."

"There will be a short presentation by some of our staff on developing ideas and resources that can help to develop your idea as an organic producer," continues Perrault. "In the afternoon, we have a speaker from Pure Source, which is a company that has done a good job in the organic sector, encouraging the processing of organic products. The business of processed organic food will be discussed."

This will be followed by a presentation on resources available at the Saskatchewan Food Industry Development Centre in Saskatoon for creating an organic food product.

"Our last speaker is Don Mitchell. He will talk about the politics of food, as he has written a book on the subject: 'Grow Locally, Eat Locally, the Market Politics of Food.' This will be music to our ears: he encourages consumers to eat locally."

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SASKATCHEWAN BEEF SYMPOSIUM PREPARES PRODUCERS FOR INDUSTRY FUTURE

This will be about as complete an overview of what's in store for the beef sector in the province as anyone can access.

The Saskatchewan Beef Symposium that will take place on February 8 and 9 in Saskatoon will prepare producers for the future of the beef industry, explains Saskatchewan Beef Industry Chair John McKinnon.

"The event is the creation of four groups in the province charged with beef research, extension and development activities: the University of Saskatchewan, the Western Beef Development Centre, Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food (SAF), and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.

"We got together to put on a symposium that focuses on issues that are relevant to producers, specifically where the industry will develop in terms of value-added beef production, as well as where the current research focuses of these groups are—how they impact beef producers."

The Saskatchewan Beef Symposium takes place every two years. It is open to beef producers and industry representatives who seek to increase their knowledge on a number of issues.

"Among these, we are focusing on the development of the ethanol industry in Saskatchewan. This is an area where we see significant growth, particularly in how it integrates with cattle feeding operations," notes McKinnon.

To address this issue, the ethanol session will feature Lionel LaBelle, the President of the Saskatchewan Ethanol Council; a representative from Husky Energy; Keith Rueve of Pound-Maker Agventures Ltd; and Vern Racz, Director of the Prairie Feed Resource Centre at the University of Saskatchewan.

"The Pound-Maker people are talking about the integration of cattle and ethanol," explains McKinnon. "The people from Husky are talking about what their plans are going to be, how they will interact with the cattle industry in Western Canada, as well as with the Saskatchewan Ethanol Council."

"There will be emphasis on the conventional stand-alone ethanol plant, but also on the integrated ethanol/cattle approach, to be more specific. It has huge potential for the livestock industry," says SAF Livestock Development Specialist Bryan Doig.

"On one hand, we have the feedlots utilizing spent grains that are produced at the ethanol plant as a by-product. The integrated concept means that, instead of the stand-alone ethanol plant that is just producing ethanol and distiller's dry grain, what we have is an ethanol plant that is connected to a feedlot, so all of the wet grain and solubles that are by-products of ethanol production are utilized as livestock feed, without having unnecessary costs like extra drying," Doig explains.

This covers just one of five sessions, emphasizes McKinnon.

"We have a very interesting session looking at value-added beef production in the province, where we get producer groups such as Natural Valley Farms and Prairie Heritage Beef Producers breaking new ground. They will be talking about their plans to take control of their market and elaborate on how they will go directly to consumers with their product."

Other sessions will focus on the production of superior beef carcasses, and the Kyoto Accord and how it affects Saskatchewan beef producers. There will also be a session on alternative management ideas for grazing and wintering your beef cows.

Larry Thomas, Associate Editor of the Canadian Cattleman Magazine, will deliver the keynote address on Wednesday, February 8. The theme will be "The Canadian Beef Producer Reality Show—Challenges from Within."

The symposium brochure is available online at http://www.wbdc.sk.ca/.

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COPELAND SEEDS NEVER LOSES SIGHT OF FARM ROOTS

It may be one of the most successful farm-based operations in the Rosetown-Elrose area. Copeland Seeds has never lost sight of its family farm roots, says Bob Copeland.

"We are the processor—the middlemen hired by the exporters to process the product for them and to get it to port on time, in containers or hopper cars or boxcars, or whatever they want to ship it in," Copeland says. "We process lentils primarily, but all kinds of grain for export for different companies. We got into the cleaning business in 1968. My father started to do pedigreed seed, and in 1978, we got into lentils. It has just taken off from there."

The business started as an operation firmly grounded in reality, explains Copeland.

"We started small, as most businesses should, and over the years, we have done sunflowers, canaryseed, a few chickpeas, and to date we still clean a lot of common seed for the local growers, cereal grain mostly. We have 13 full-time employees right now, and we have had anywhere up to 22 people hired throughout the year.

"We work on contract for a set price. Depending on the year, on average we may handle 22,000 metric tons of just lentils. The most we have done is 29,000 metric tons in a year."

Copeland notes that "The pulse industry has become limited in part due to our transportation challenges. We could do more, but logistically, we can't ship the product overseas—it does limit you at times in terms of how much you can do volume wise."

Despite limitations, the operation has done quite well over the years, success Copeland attributes to service and quality.

"We have maintained a high standard in the quality that we put out and in the work we do when we are loading containers. We make sure the container is good; we make sure the bags aren't ripped; we try to look after this as much as we can. I guess in the early years, there weren't a lot of processors around and we actually had quite a few people exporting to Spain, Columbia and other places coming here and witnessing the quality of the work that we did, and I guess that has just continued on.

"What we say we can do with the product, we try and carry it through. I guess we have gained the trust of the grower, as well as that of the importer and exporter."

Copeland is not only carrying on a family tradition—he is building on it. "It has been a family run business since my father started it. We do farm, as well. We have a separate company name for that, Copeland Farms. The seed is the commercial business. And through Copeland Farms, we continuous crop 7,600 acres of mostly lentils and malting barley—two-row barley.

"We have been very fortunate to work with people like Dr. Brian Harvey, a plant breeder at the University of Saskatchewan. Such relationships enabled us to access the new two-row out there that so far has grown in demand: the Copeland barley. We hope that continues."

Like many agri-entrepreneurs, Copeland always has an eye on the future. "In our family, we believe that agriculture will get turned around and treat us alright. The last few years have not been good in agriculture. To tamper that, we don't keep all our eggs in one basket. My grandfather started farming in 1932 in this area. He passed it on to my father. Now, I'm looking after it with him."

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